

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2013*

## **Remarks at the Planned Parenthood National Conference**

*April 26, 2013*

*The President.* Hello, everybody! Thank you. Thank you! All right, everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. You're making me blush. *[Laughter]*

*Audience member.* I love you!

*The President.* I love you back. Thank you.

Cecile, thank you for the warm introduction, and thank you for the outstanding leadership that you've shown over the years. You just do a great, great job. I want to thank all of you for the remarkable work that you're doing day in, day out in providing quality health care to women all across America. You are somebody that women—young women, old women, women in between—count on for so many important services. And we are truly grateful to you.

I'm sorry that I could not be at the party yesterday. I understand it was a little wild. *[Laughter]* That's what I heard. But as all of you know, obviously, we've gone through a pretty tough week and a half, and I was down in Texas, letting know—letting the people of West, Texas, know that we all love them and care about them in their time of grieving.

But obviously, this is a special national conference because it's been nearly a hundred years since the first health clinic of what later would become Planned Parenthood opened its doors to women in Brooklyn. And for nearly a century now, one core principle has guided everything all of you do: that women should be allowed to make their own decisions about their own health. It's a simple principle.

So what I see in this audience, extraordinary doctors and nurses and advocates and staff who work tirelessly to keep the doors at health centers all across the country going, then I'm reminded of those very early efforts and all the strides that we've made in subsequent decades. And I also think about the millions of mothers and daughters and wives and sisters, friends and neighbors, who walk through those doors every year.

And somewhere, there's a woman who just received a new lease on life because of a screening that you provided that helped catch her cancer in time. Somewhere, there's a woman who's breathing easier today because of the support and counseling she got at her local Planned Parenthood health clinic. Somewhere, there's a young woman starting a career who, because of you, is able to decide for herself when she wants to start a family.

One in five women in this country has turned to Planned Parenthood for health care—one in five. And for many, Planned Parenthood is their primary source of health care, not just for contraceptive care, but for lifesaving preventive care, like cancer screenings and health counseling.

So when politicians try to turn Planned Parenthood into a punching bag, they're not just talking about you, they're talking about the millions of women who you serve. And when they talk about cutting off your funding, let's be clear: They're talking about telling many of those women, you're on your own. They're talking about shutting those women out at a time when they may need it most, shutting off communities that need more health care options for women, not less.

So the fact is, after decades of progress, there's still those who want to turn back the clock to policies more suited to the 1950s than the 21st century. And they've been involved in an orchestrated and historic effort to roll back basic rights when it comes to women's health.

Forty-two States have introduced laws that would ban or severely limit access to a woman's right to choose; laws that would make it harder for women to get the contraceptive care that they need; laws that would cut off access to cancer screenings and end educational programs that help prevent teen pregnancy.

In North Dakota, they just passed a law that outlaws your right to choose, starting as early as 6 weeks, even if a woman's raped. A woman may not even know that she's pregnant at 6 weeks. In Mississippi, a ballot initiative was put forward that could not only have outlawed your right to choose, but could have had all sorts of other far-reaching consequences, like cutting off fertility treatments, making certain forms of contraception a crime.

That's absurd. It's wrong. It's an assault on women's rights. And that's why when the people of Mississippi were given a chance to vote on that initiative, they turned it down. And Mississippi is a conservative State. *[Applause]* Mississippi is a conservative State, but they wanted to make clear there's nothing conservative about the government injecting itself into decisions best made between a woman and her doctor. And folks are trying to do this all across the country.

When you read about some of these laws, you want to check the calendar; you want to make sure you're still living in 2013. *[Laughter]*

Forty years after the Supreme Court affirmed a woman's constitutional right to privacy, including the right to choose, we shouldn't have to remind people that when it comes to a woman's health, no politician should get to decide what's best for you. No insurer should get to decide what kind of care that you get. The only person who should get to make decisions about your health is you. That's why we fought so hard to make health care reform a reality.

That principle is at the heart of the Affordable Care Act. Because of the ACA, most insurance plans are now covering the cost of contraceptive care so that a working mom doesn't have to put off the care she needs just so she can pay her bills on time. Because of the Affordable Care Act, 47 million women have new access to preventive care like mammograms and cancer screenings with no copay, no deductible, no out-of-pocket costs, so they don't have to put off a mammogram just because money is tight. Because of the Affordable Care Act, young people under the age of 26 can now stay on their parent's health care plan. And insurance companies soon will no longer be able to deny you coverage based on preexisting conditions like breast cancer or charge you more just because you are a woman. Those days are ending. *[Applause]* Those days are ending.

Now, I know how hard you worked to help us pass health care reform. You and your supporters got out there: You organized, you mobilized, you made your voices heard. It made all the difference. But here's the thing: If Americans don't know how to access the new benefits and protections that they're going to receive as we implement this law, then health care reform won't make much of a difference in their lives.

So I'm here to also ask for your help, because we need to get the word out. We need you to tell your patients, your friends, your neighbors, your family members what the health care law means for them. Make sure they know that if they don't have health insurance, they'll be able to sign up for quality, affordable health insurance starting this fall in an online marketplace where private insurers will compete for their business. Make sure that they know that there are

plans out there right now that cover the cost of contraception and preventive care free of charge.

We've got to spread the word, particularly among women, particularly among young women, who are the ones who are most likely to benefit from these laws. We need all the women who come through your doors telling their children, their husbands, and their folks in their neighborhoods about their health care options. We need all college students who come through your doors to call up their friends and post on Facebook talking about the protections and benefits that are kicking in.

And you are all in a unique position to deliver that message because the women you serve know you and they trust you. And the reason for that is that you haven't let them down before.

I know it's not always easy. As Cecile describes, Planned Parenthood is the only organization that she's ever been at where there are opponents who, in her words, "literally get up every day trying to figure out how to keep us from doing our work." Now, if she had worked in the administration—[laughter]—she'd be more familiar with this phenomenon. [Laughter] But when it comes to your patients, you never let them down, no matter what.

And that's because you never forget who this is all about. This is about a woman from Chicago named goCourtney who has a disease that can leave women infertile. So in college, she turned to Planned Parenthood for access to affordable contraceptive care to keep her healthy. You didn't just help her plan for a family, you made sure she could start one. And today, she's got two beautiful kids. That's what Planned Parenthood is about.

This is about a woman in Washington State named Joyce who for years could only afford health care at her local Planned Parenthood clinic. And heeding your advice, she never missed her annual exam. During one of them, your doctors helped catch an aggressive form of cervical cancer early enough to save her life. Today, she's been cancer free for 25 years.

So every day, in every State, in every center that Planned Parenthood operates, there are stories like those: lives you've saved, women you've empowered, families that you've strengthened. That's why, no matter how great the challenge, no matter how fierce the opposition, if there's one thing the past few years have shown, it's that Planned Parenthood is not going anywhere. It's not going anywhere today. It's not going anywhere tomorrow.

As long as we've got to fight to make sure women have access to quality, affordable health care, and as long as we've got to fight to protect a woman's right to make her own choices about her own health, I want you to know that you've also got a President who's going to be right there with you fighting every step of the way.

Thank you, Planned Parenthood. God bless you. God bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:17 a.m. in the Washington Marriott Wardman Park hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Cecile Richards, president, Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

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